



## **Services for clients with an implanted hearing device**

### **Specialist hearing services**

Clients of the program who use a cochlear implant(s) or other implantable devices may be eligible to receive specialist hearing services from Australian Hearing. The Department of Health funds Australian Hearing to provide specialist hearing services through the Community Service Obligations (CSO) component of the program. These services are provided to clients who have additional hearing and communication needs. Clients can choose to stay with their current provider or transfer to Australian Hearing for specialist hearing services. It is important to discuss your options with your current provider.

### **Cochlear implants**

Cochlear implants are used to provide clients with severe to profound hearing loss with adequate hearing for understanding speech. There are two components of a cochlear implant, the implanted component that is surgically placed under the skin, and an externally worn speech processor that sits behind the ear. The speech processor requires ongoing maintenance and can be upgraded to newer technology every three to five years depending on clinical need. The internal component is rarely upgraded unless revision surgery is required to fix implant failure or malfunction.

### **Services provided by Australian Hearing to clients with a cochlear implant**

For a small annual fee Australian Hearing will provide paediatric, young adults and adult clients who use a cochlear implant(s) with batteries and minor maintenance for their speech processor(s). Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Gold or White card (for hearing loss) holders who have a cochlear implant(s) are exempt from maintenance payments. Additionally, clients who are National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants may receive the annual maintenance fee contribution as part of their funded support package, where their planner has assessed this as being appropriate and necessary.

Clients who wear a hearing aid on the opposite ear to their cochlear implant (bimodal fitting) will be able to receive all other hearing services, such as hearing aid fittings, maintenance and ongoing management, from Australian Hearing.

Australian Hearing does not program or map cochlear implant speech processors. Clients will need to see their cochlear implant centre to have their implant programmed.

### **Services provided by other Hearing Service Providers to clients with a cochlear implant**

Clients who wear a hearing aid and a cochlear implant can choose to receive parallel services. Parallel services allow clients to remain with their current hearing service provider who will deliver hearing services, batteries, maintenance and repairs for their hearing aid, at the same time Australian Hearing will maintain the client's speech processor.

If a client chooses to receive parallel services they will pay an annual maintenance fee to both Australian Hearing and their current hearing services provider.

DVA Gold or White card (for hearing loss) holders are exempt from maintenance

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payments for fully subsidised hearing aids, and cochlear implants. Additionally, NDIS clients may receive the annual maintenance fee contribution as part of their funded support package, where their planner has assessed this as being appropriate and necessary.

### **Cochlear implant speech processor upgrades**

Children and young adults aged under 26 who receive hearing services from Australian Hearing can only receive replacement and upgrade speech processors through the program if they meet the clinical criteria set by Australian Hearing.

The legislation governing the program does not allow funding for speech processor replacements or upgrades for adult clients of the program. In these instances clients may be supported through private health insurance or will need to fund the cost of replacements or upgrades themselves.

Alternatively, clients of the program who are NDIS participants may be able to request funding assistance towards processor upgrades or replacements through the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).

### **Other implantable devices**

Other implantable devices may include implanted bone conducted hearing aids and middle ear implants (MEI). These devices are used as an alternative to hearing aids for clients with chronic middle ear infections, single sided deafness, or malformation of the external and/or middle ear.

Implanted bone conducted hearing aids use bone conduction to send sounds directly to the inner ear. There are two components to these hearing aids, the externally worn sound processor and the implant that is surgically implanted into the mastoid bone.

Similarly, there are two components to a MEI, the external speech processor and the surgically implanted device that is attached to a structure in the middle ear. The speech processor converts sound into electrical signals which are sent to the implant. The implant directly stimulates or vibrates the structures of the middle ear that transmits the sound to the inner ear.

### **Services to clients with other implantable devices**

The speech processor of an implantable device (other than a cochlear implant) may be subsidised through the program when a conventional hearing aid is not medically appropriate. To be able to receive a subsidy from the program clients must be assessed by Australian Hearing to determine if they meet the eligibility criteria for an implantable device. Clients who have their implantable device arranged through Australian Hearing, and are an Australian Hearing CSO client, can continue to receive hearing services from Australian Hearing as normal.

Clients who do not arrange their implantable device through Australian Hearing, but would like to receive hearing services from Australian Hearing as CSO clients, will need to contact Australian Hearing to determine if they meet the eligibility criteria.

## Batteries and maintenance

For a small annual fee, Australian Hearing CSO clients who wear an implantable device other than a cochlear implant are able to receive batteries and maintenance through Australian Hearing.

Alternatively, clients who have arranged their implantable device privately can choose to stay with their current provider. For an annual fee clients can bring their private implantable device (other than a cochlear implant) onto the program and receive batteries and maintenance. Providers must agree to maintain the private devices under the voucher component of the program. Providers will need to update the client's service history on the Hearing Services Online Portal and record on the client file the date when the device will be maintained from and the device code/serial number.

### Claiming information for providers

Provided the client has never been fitted under the program, providers can e-Claim an item 790 to bring the private implantable device (other than a cochlear implant) onto the program. If the client has previously been fitted under the program, providers will need to update the fitting details in the client's service history and claim for battery and maintenance as normal. Providers will also be able to claim for annual review services (item 930/940).

## Speech processor replacements and upgrades for other implantable devices

Speech processor replacements and upgrades for other implantable devices are not covered under the program. Clients may be able to access funding through private health insurance or they will need to fund the cost of the upgrade or replacement themselves. Clients who are NDIS participants may be able to request funding assistance towards processor upgrades or replacements through the NDIA.

Please speak with your hearing services provider or implant clinic about the options available to you.

## More information

If you would like more information about services for clients with implantable devices or specialist hearing services please contact Australian Hearing on 131 797 or contact the Department by emailing [hearing@health.gov.au](mailto:hearing@health.gov.au) or calling 1800 500 726 or (NRS) 1800 555 727